

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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O 202006Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9431
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 9527

FOR USDEL SECRETARY

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EG IS
SUBJ: SADAT'S SPEECH TO THE KNESSET

REF.: (A) JERUSALEM 1923, (B) JERUSALEM 1925

1. SUMMARY: SADAT'S SPEECH TO THE KNESSET, WHILE RICH IN EMOTIONAL CONTENT, CONTAINED FEW SURPRISES. THE MOST TROUBLESOME POINTS FOR ISRAELIS WILL BE HIS DEMAND FOR A PALESTINIAN STATE AND HIS CALL FOR A COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. WHILE SADAT COULD BE EXPECTED TO MAKE THESE POINTS, ISRAELIS WERE PROBABLY DISAPPOINTED AT THE BLUNTNESS WITH WHICH THEY HEARD THESE DEMANDS FROM THE ROSTRUM OF THEIR KNESSET. TO HIS CREDIT, BEGIN'S RESPONSE WAS COMPARATIVELY RESTRAINED AND CONCILIATORY ON
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SUBSTANCE, BUT QUITE ORDINARY IN ITS RHETORICAL QUALITY. HE REPEATED HIS FAMILIAR REVIEW OF JEWISH HISTORY BUT DELIBERATELY AVOIDED ENGAGING SADAT ON SOME OF THE MORE PROVOCATIVE POINTS. PERES DID LITTLE TO ADD TO THE OCCASION. THE AVERAGE ISRAELI, WITH HIS HOPES RAISED BY THE DRAMA OF SADAT'S ARRIVAL AND VISIT TO JERUSALEM, MAY HAVE HAD HIS EXPECTATIONS SOMEWHAT DE-

FLATED. INITIAL COMMENTS FROM POLITICIANS AND OBSERVERS INDICATE THEY ARE NOT OVERLY DISAPPOINTED, HOWEVER, AND SEE THE SPEECHES AS OPENING GAMBITS IN WHAT WILL BE COMPLEX AND DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS. END SUMMARY

2. ISRAELIS WILL AGREE WITH SADAT'S STATEMENTS REFERRING TO THE SUFFERINGS OF BOTH PEOPLES AND HIS CALL TO END SUCH SACRIFICES. THEY WILL ALSO WELCOME HIS EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT FOR A PERMANENT PEACE BASED ON JUSTICE AND IN PARTICULAR HIS RESTATEMENT OF EGYPT'S WILLINGNESS TO LIVE TOGETHER WITH IT IN PEACE. THEY WILL ALSO BE PLEASED TO NOTE SADAT'S CRITICISM OF PAST ARAB PRACTICE -- "WE USED TO REJECT YOU" --- AND THIS IS STILL HAPPENING" AND WILL SEE IN THIS A TACIT REPUDIATION OF SUCH ACTIONS.

3. ISRAELIS WILL NOT LIKE SADAT'S CLAIM THAT IT WAS ISRAEL WHO BUILT WALLS -- OF THREATS, OF REJECTIONS, OF FEAR. THEY WILL ALSO NOT LIKE HIS STATEMENT THAT EGYPT IS NOT PREPARED TO BARGAIN OVER TERRITORY, NOR HIS REMINDER THAT LAND IS AS IMPORTANT TO THE ARABS AS IT IS TO THE ISRAELIS. THEY WILL FIND DIFFICULT HIS TELLING THEM THAT WITHDRAWAL FROM ALL ARAB TERRITORIES IS "A FOREGONE CONCLUSION" AND IS A "LOGICAL AND UNDISPUTED FACT," WITH THE IMPLICATION THAT IT THEREFORE NEED NOT EVEN BE DISCUSSED.

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4. PROBABLY THE MOST DIFFICULT PORTION OF HIS SPEECH FOR ISRAELIS WILL BE THE DISCUSSION OF PALESTINIANS AND "THEIR LEGITIMATE RIGHTS" AND HIS CALL TO RECOGNIZE THE RIGHT OF THE PALESTINIANS TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN STATE. PARTICULARLY BLUNT WAS HIS STATEMENT THAT ISRAELIS HAVE ESTABLISHED THEIR NATIONAL HOME "ON LAND THAT DID NOT ALL BELONG TO YOU."

5. TWO OF THE FIVE POINTS WHICH SADAT WANTS TO SETTLE AT GENEVA ARE CERTAINLY CONTROVERSIAL: THE SECOND POINT CALLS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHT OF THE PALESTINIANS TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN STATE AND THE FIFTH POINT CALLS FOR ENDING THE STATE OF BELLIGERENCY, A CONDITION WHICH MOST ISRAELIS BELIEVE SUPERFLUOUS, WITH A PEACE TREATY. THEY WILL BE DISAPPOINTED THAT HE DID NOT SPECIFICALLY CALL FOR A TREATY OF PEACE.

6. BEGIN'S SPEECH WAS NOTABLE IN THAT HE ASSIDUOUSLY AVOIDED COMMENT OR REBUTTAL TO ANY OF THE KEY BUZZ POINTS RAISED IN SADAT'S SPEECH. BUT FOR THE REST IT WAS A PEDESTRIAN PERFORMANCE -- A TIRED SPEECH WHICH

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INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 PRS-01 SSO-00
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MOST OBSERVERS HAD HEARD ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS. HE
BEGAN BY CALLING ON BOTH SIDES TO PUT THE PAST BE-
HIND THEM AND YET PROCEEDED TO REVIEW JESIHS HISTORY.
PREDICTABLY, HE ARGUED THAT ISRAEL HAD NOT TAKEN LAND
BUT HAD RECLAIMED ITS HOMELAND. HE CALLED AGAIN FOR
NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN EQUALS AND SAID HE WAS READY TO
SIT TOGETHER AT GENEVA AND NEGOTIATE UNDER 242 AND
338.

7. PERES WAS ONLY marginally better in dwelling on the
past thirty years. Most noteworthy was his emphasis
on the necessity to find a solution for Palestinian
identity without endangering the security of Israel.

8. INITIAL REACTIONS OF MKS AND POLITICAL OBSERVERS
ARE THAT THE SPEAKERS WERE DISAPPOINTING, BUT THE
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MAJOR INITIATIVES WERE NOT TO BE EXPECTED; SEVERAL STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRIVATE TALKS TONIGHT AND TOMORROW. FOR EXAMPLE, ENERGY MINISTER MODAI SAID HE WAS NOT SURPRISED AT SADAT'S SPEECH AND THAT HE HAD NOT EXPECTED THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT TO CHANGE HIS KNOWN POSITIONS HE FELT A RAY OF LIGHT WAS SADAT'S OMISSION OF ANY MENTION OF THE PLO.

9. ZEEV SCHIFF SAID HE FOUND SADAT TOUGH AND FELT HE HAD RULED OUT NEGOTIATIONS. HE WAS PARTICULARLY DISAPPOINTED IN SADAT'S REMARKS ON JERUSALEM AND THE FACT HE HAD NOT INVITED BEGIN TO VISIT CAIRO. AMNON RUBENSTEIN OF THE DMC SAID THAT WE HAVE NOW HEARD THE STARTING POSITIONS OF EACH SIDE; WE MUST NOT FORGET WHAT HAS OCCURED IN THE ARAB WORLD IN THE LAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS AND MUST REMEMBER THAT SADAT WAS SPEAKING TO THAT AUDIENCE. HE ALSO FOUND IT SIGNIFICANT THAT NEITHER SADAT NOR BEGIN HAD RAISED THE SUBJECT OF THE PLO AND THAT BEGIN HAD ALSO NOT MENTIONED ISRAELI REJECTION OF AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE. HE FELT IT ENCOURAGING THAT BEGIN HAD STRESSED POINTS OF AGREEMENT.

10. FORMER MINISTER SHLOMO HILLEL OF THE LABOR PARTY THOUGHT NONE OF THE SPEAKERS HAD SAID ANYTHING DIFFERENT FROM THEIR PREVIOUS POSITIONS. HE CHARACTERIZED THE SPEECHES AS THE OPENING OF A CHESS GAME AND COMMENTED THAT OPENING MOVES ARE ALL SIMILAR. MOSHE SHAMIR OF THE LIKUD, HOWEVER, FELT THAT SADAT WAS DISAPPOINTING IN HIS POLITICAL MESSAGE BUT STRESSED THAT EVERYTHING NOW IS OPEN FOR NEGOTIATIONS.

11. AVRAHAM SCHWETIZER (HAARETZ) CHARACTERIZED SADAT'S CONFIDENTIAL

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SPEECH AS "VERY TOUGH" SAYING HE HAD SHOWN NO FLEXIBILITY. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE COMMENDED BEGIN FOR HAVING "ROUNDED OFF HIS EDGES." BEGIN'S SPEECH WAS REMARKABLE FOR THE NEGATIVES HE OMITTED (I.E., ABSENCE OF REFERENCE TO A PALESTINIAN STATE, ETC.). ALTHOUGH SCHWEITZER IS CONVINCED THE ISRAELI PUBLIC WILL HAVE COOLED CONSIDERABLY TOWARD SADAT AFTER HEARING HIS SPEECH, HE (LIKE OTHER KNOWLEDGABLE OBSERVERS) PLACED CONSIDERABLE HOPE IN THE PRIVATE TALKS. HE SAID FAR TOO MUCH HAS BEEN INVESTED IN THE VISIT FOR THE PARTIES TO ALLOW NOTHING MORE TO HAPPEN. "BEAR IN MIND THAT IN HIS WORKING MEETINGS WITH SADAT, BEGIN IS ACCOMPANIED BY DAYAN (A PRAGMATIST, WHO KNOWS HOW TO TRADE) AND YADIN (DOVISH ON THE WEST BANK)." SCHWEITZER ALSO REPORTED THE RUMOR

THAT SADAT HAS PROPOSED GETTING TOGETHER WITH DAYAN
TO HAMMER OUT A DEAL.

12. CONCLUSION: WHILE IT IS PERHAPS UNFAIR
TO SAY THAT THIS WAS AN AFTERNOON OF MISSED OPPORTUNITIES
IT IS NOT AN EXAGGERATION TO NOTE THAT NONE OF THE SPEAKERS
MATCHED THE EXPECTATIONS WHICH HAD BEEN CREATED IN THE
MINDS OF MOST ISRAELIS. THERE WAS LITTLE CHANGE FROM
PREVIOUS POSITIONS, OTHER THAN THE DRAMA OF SEEING TWO
ERSTWHILE ENEMIES SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER FACE TO FACE.
ALTHOUGH IT IS TOO SOON AFTER THE EVENT TO KNOW, WE
SENSE ISRAELIS HAD THEIR EXPECTATIONS DEFLATED SOMEWHAT
BY THE LITANY OF TIRED RESTATEMENTS OF OLD POSITIONS.
WHATEVER EXPECTATIONS MAY REMAIN INEVITABLY NOW SHIFT TO THE
WORKING MEETINGS.
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